

THE EMPEROR AND THE LITTLE GIRL

By GEORGE BERNARD SHAW

Illustrations by Boardman Robinson

"It is not my doing," said the Emperor helplessly, when the little girl put questions—Shavian questions—to him. The little girl, of course, was but one of the waifs of the War Zone; the Emperor was the Kaiser; and they met at night, between the lines, and talked. It is a subject and a situation for the great British satirist to revel in, and perhaps as you read it the thought will come that the Kaiser himself is but a child, for all his hapless majesty; as lacking in understanding as was she who found freedom in the bursting of a shell.

a little girl, and she was much too young to be up at a quarter to twelve in the middle of the night. The clinking and squeaking was because she was carrying a tin can. And she was crying, not loudly, but just whimpering. When she

a Boche," said the Emperor, severely. "That is very, very wrong."

"No," said the little girl, "it is quite right, I assure you. An English soldier is a Tommy, and a French soldier is a Hairy, and a German soldier is a Boche."

"The Tommy said there was. He said it was a great, big bear that boiled little children in his inside after eating them."

"The English never tell the truth," said the Emperor.

"He was very kind at first," said the little girl, beginning to cry again. "I don't think he would have said it if he didn't believe it, unless the pain of his wound made him fancy things like bears."

"Don't cry," said the Emperor. "He was not unkind; they were all afraid you would be wounded like themselves, and wanted you to go home so as to be out of danger."

"Oh, I'm quite used to shells," said the little girl. "I go about at night giving water to the wounded, because my father was left lying out for five nights, and suffered dreadfully from thirst."

"Ich habe es nicht gewollt," said the

little girl. "If they see you they will fire at us."

"Very well, then," said the Emperor. "For your sake, I will lie down while you are with me, but now you must let me take you home. Where is your house?"

The little girl laughed. "We haven't a house," she said. "First the Germans shelled our village. Then they took it, and the French shelled it. Then the English came and shelled the Germans out of it. Now, all three of them shell it. Our house has been struck seven times, and our cowhouse nineteen times. And, just fancy, not even the cow was killed. My papa says it has cost 25,000 francs to knock down our cowhouse. He is very proud of it."

"Ich habe es nicht gewollt," said the Emperor, coming all over bad again. When he felt better he said, "And where do you live now?"

"Anywhere we can," said the girl. "Oh, it is quite easy; you soon get used to it. What are you? Are you a stretcher bearer?"

"No, my child," said the Emperor. "I am what is called a Kaiser."

"I did not know there was more than one," said the little girl.

"There are three," said the Kaiser.

"Do they all have to turn their mustaches up?" said the little girl.

"No," said the Kaiser. "They are allowed to wear beards when their mustaches won't turn up."

"They should put them in curl papers like I do with my hair at Easter," said the little girl. "What does a Kaiser do? Does he fight, or does he pick up the wounded?"

"He doesn't exactly do anything," said the Emperor. "He thinks."

"What does he think?" said the girl, who, like all young things, knew so little about people that when she met them she had to ask them a great many questions, and was sometimes told not to be inquisitive, though her mother usually said, "Ask no questions, and you'll be told no lies."

"If the Kaiser were to tell, that wouldn't be thinking, would it?" said the Emperor.

"I suppose not," said the little girl. "But, anyhow, what are you doing here so late when you are not wounded?"

"Will you promise not to tell anybody if I tell you?" said the Emperor. "It's a secret."

"I promise faithfully," said the girl. "Please do tell me. I love secrets."

"Then," said the Emperor, "I had to tell all my soldiers this morning that I was very sorry I could not go into the trenches and fight under fire as they do, and that the reason was, I had to think so hard for them all; that if I were killed they would not know what to do and they would all be beaten and killed."

"That was very naughty of you," said the little girl, "for it wasn't true, you know, was it? When my uncle was killed another man just stepped into his place, and the battle went on just as if nothing had happened. I think they might have stopped just for a minute, but they didn't. If you were killed, wouldn't somebody step into your place?"

"Yes," said the Emperor; "my son would."

"Then why did you tell them such an awful fib?" said the little girl.

"I was made to," said the Emperor. "That is what a Kaiser is for, to be made get up and say things that neither he nor any one else believes. I saw it in the faces of some of the men to-day that they didn't believe me, and thought I was a coward making excuses. So when the night came I went to bed and pretended to go asleep, but, when they were all gone, I got up and stole out here by

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Boardman Robinson

ARE YOU A BOCHE?" SAID THE LITTLE GIRL

The Emperor had a dreadful shock. Before he could think of what he was doing he said to the dead men the German words, "Ich habe es nicht gewollt," which means, in English, "It is not my doing," or "I never intended to," or, sometimes, "It wasn't me"—just what you say when you are scolded for doing something wrong. Then he scrambled out of the pit and walked away from it in another direction. But his inside felt so bad that he had to sit down when he had gone only a little way. At least he could have gone on if he had tried, but an ammunition case which lay in his path was so convenient to sit on that he thought he would rest until he felt better.

The next thing that happened was very surprising, for a brown thing came out of the darkness, and he would have taken it for a dog if it had not clinked and squeaked as well as made footsteps. When it came nearer he saw that it was

saw the Emperor she was not a bit frightened or surprised; she only stopped crying with a great sniff and sob, and said: "I am sorry, but all my water is gone."

"What a pity!" said the Emperor, who was accustomed to children. "Are you very, very thirsty? I have a flask, you see, but I'm afraid what is in it would be too strong for you to drink."

"I don't want to drink," said the little girl, quite surprised. "Don't you? Aren't you wounded?"

"No," said the Emperor. "What are you crying for?"

The little girl almost began to cry again. "The soldiers were very unkind to me," she said, going closer up to the Emperor and leaning against his knee. "There are four of them in a mine crater over there. There is a Tommy and a Hairy and two Boches."

"You must not call a German soldier

My mother calls them like that. Everybody does. One of the Boches wears spectacles and is like a college teacher. The other has been lying out for two nights. None of them can move. They are very bad. I gave them water, and at first they thanked me and prayed that God would bless me, except the college teacher. Then a shell came, and, though it was quite far off, they drove me away and said that if I didn't go straight home as fast as I could a bear would come out of the wood and eat me and my father would beat me with a strap. The college teacher told them out loud that they were softies and that I didn't matter, but he whispered to me to go home quickly. May I stay with you, please? My father would not beat me, I know, but I am afraid of the bear."

"You may stay with me," said the Emperor, "and I will not let the bear touch you. There really isn't any bear."

"Are you sure?" said the little girl.

Emperor, feeling very sick again.

"Are you a Boche?" said the little girl; for the Emperor had spoken to her before in French. "You speak French very well, but I thought you were English."

"I am half English," said the Emperor.

"That's funny," said the little girl. "You must be very careful, for both sides will try to shoot you."

The Emperor gave a queer little laugh, and the moon came out and showed him to the girl more plainly than before. "You have a nice cloak and your uniform is very clean," she said. "How can you keep it so clean when you have to lie down in the dirt when a star shell shines?"

"I do not lie down. I stand up. That is how I keep my uniform clean," said the Emperor.

"But you mustn't stand up," said the